



WESTERN CAUCUS NEWS

Lawmakers Draw Attention to Real World Costs Associated with Federal Lands

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Washington D.C. – Today, Members of the Congressional Western Caucus participated in a hearing of the House Resources Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health on the status of federal lands in America. Western members brought special attention to the costs federal land ownership imposes on local communities.

The hearing examined the amount of federal land the government owns and the impacts the continued growth in the federal estate has on local levels. In addition, two state representatives highlighted how essential services such as schools, hospitals, police and fire protection and search and rescue suffer due to the inability to tax federal lands.

Following witness testimony from the federal, local and private sectors, Caucus members asked federal land managers to account for how much land the BLM and Forest Service own and why their agencies continue to add lands to the federal portfolio when maintenance backlogs are estimated at \$15 billion and rural communities adjacent to federal land continue to suffer from a limited tax base.

Congressional Western Caucus Chairman Chris Cannon (UT-03) said “federal agencies need to know what they own and where they own it. It’s unconscionable that more than eight years have passed since even one agency conducted a comprehensive report. And to make matters worse, federal acreage continues to expand while western communities continue to lose out on millions of dollars each year due to the presence of federal acreage. Over the last forty years, the federal government has spent nearly \$13 billion on land acquisition. That money has gone to purchase an area larger than the size of Florida. We must reverse this trend.”

“High federal ownership impedes the ability of communities to fund vital services like schools and hospitals. While Payment in Lieu of Taxes helps rural communities deal with their lack of a taxable land base, it is far from enough to make up for the revenue shortfalls and resulting financial challenges they face. It is vital that federal agencies reassess their need for expanding ownership rather than continue to acquire land they cannot afford to manage,” said Rep. Jim Gibbons (NV-02).

Rep. John J. Duncan, Jr. (TN-02) said “Government at all levels in this country now owns or controls half the land and continuously wants more. You can never satisfy government's appetite for money or land. On top of this, government at all levels is continually putting more and more restrictions on the land that remains in private ownership.”

“The feds own too much land in the West and I am glad today's hearing reiterated that point. As a former public school teacher, I feel particularly passionate about the financial harm that is being done to our school kids because so much of our land and tax base is tied up in federal ownership. Students in the West deserve to have this injustice fixed,” said Rep. Rob Bishop (UT-01).

“The federal government spends about \$200 million a year to acquire new land, when it can't even take care of the land it's got,” said Rep. Jeff Flake (AZ-06). “Rather than buying new land, I think it's clear to those of us in the West that the federal government ought to be turning that land over to private hands, where it can be managed more efficiently and used more productively.”

The Western Caucus is a group of 60 members of Congress committed to protecting the interests and ideals of the West.

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